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The Eastern Bloc, Human Rights, and the Global Fight against Apartheid

Sebastian Gehrig, James Mark, Paul Betts, Kim Christiaens and Idesbald Goddeeris

Abstract
Anti-apartheid advocacy allowed Eastern bloc countries to reframe their ideological language of solidarity towards African countries into a legalist rhetoric during the 1960s and 70s. Support for international anti-racial discrimination law and self-determination from colonial rule reinforced Eastern bloc ties to Africa after the disenchantment of the Hungarian Uprising. Rights activism against apartheid showcases, as this article argues, the socialist bloc's active contribution to the international rise of human rights language and international law during the Cold War. Eastern European dissidents eventually usurped the term apartheid based on decades of state-mandated international rights activism to criticize socialism at home.

On 1 January 1977, a soon to be famous dissident group in Czechoslovakia circulated their manifesto titled Declaration of Charter 77. The authors reminded their country's leaders that the ruling party had signed the United Nation's (UN) two International Human Rights Covenants, which had taken effect in their country in March the year before, first in 1968 and again as part of the Helsinki Accords in 1975. After this short first introductory paragraph, the authors of Charter 77 went on the attack. The communist party prohibited tens of thousands of their citizens from working in their chosen professions simply because their views differed from the official party line. Human rights as affirmed in the UN human rights conventions did not exist for these citizens. Their everyday lives instead saw constant harassment by the authorities and public organisations of the state. Charter 77 charged that Czechoslovak dissidents had become "victims of a virtual apartheid" (Charter 77: 1).

When Charter 77 used the term apartheid against the Czechoslovak state, anti-apartheid rhetoric was already a firmly established part of socialist Bloc anti-imperialist rights language. Eastern European states had come a long way since 1914 when Lenin had first endorsed the right of self-determination in the name of socialist revolution (Lenin 1972: 393-454; Quigley 2007: 133-147; Fisch 2015: 129-132). After Lenin's death, Stalin continued to pay lip service to the important link between anti-imperialism and self-determination while pursuing his national policies. When the UN was founded in 1945, the Soviet Union adopted the language of human rights and pressed for the formation of a Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities within the Commission on Human Rights. When the sub-commission took up its work in 1947, Dean Rusk who was a State Department officer at the time warned of the Eastern Bloc's intention to use the new UN body to call for an investigation into race segregation in the US. While the US and the colonial powers could weather this first attempt to establish a petition procedure against human rights violations at the UN, minority rights and the protection of human rights moved to the centre of attention. Underneath the new rhetoric of human rights, questions of ethnicity and minority rights remained longer than often assumed a focus in UN debates of the early 1950s in the context of anticolonial forces fending off attempts by imperial powers to reassert colonial power (Mazower 2004: 379-398). From the 1960s onwards, this Soviet promotion of international legal norms turned to anti-discrimination and racial discrimination law. In the resolution Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and People, the UN declared in 1960 that self-determination and colonialism were incompatible (Quigley: 115-124; Normand and Zaidi 2008: 243-288). Apartheid now moved to the centre of international debates and quickly turned into a symbol for the wider ills of colonialism and became a rallying cry of Third World anti-colonial movements. In the coming decades, the Eastern Bloc would make the Third World's

cause part of international attacks on the Western alliance using the arrival of legalist rights languages emanating from the UN.

International anti-apartheid activism has so far mostly attracted scholarly attention as a global social movement (Brock, Gosse, and Lichtenstein 2014). The role of socialist states in internationalising the apartheid issue, most visibly in their support for anti-racial discrimination norms at the UN, has not yet been fully investigated as an integral part in the rise of anti-apartheid protests nor have these national perspectives been integrated into wider histories (Gehrig 2018). Indeed, official histories of the UN written after the end of the Cold War have almost completely erased the role of the Eastern Bloc in the passage of UN anti-apartheid initiatives (United Nations Department of Public Information, 1994). Yet, socialist states discovered apartheid as a key issue to connect to the South African liberation movement and Third World liberationism long before the radical left in Western countries, NGOs, and Western governments raised awareness of apartheid (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 139-242). While socialist delegations at the UN quickly formed a united position against apartheid, governments across Eastern Europe engaged with apartheid as a human rights issue very much on national terms (Betts et al. 2019). This crucial role of the Eastern Bloc in promoting human rights language at the UN and in the international arena highlights that socialist states were not just roadBlocks to a human rights revolution or mere bystanders in the rise of human rights language as they are often portrayed (Moyn 2010; Burke 2010; Jensen 2016; Bradley 2017; Donert 2017; Richardson-Little 2013; Betts 2011). Rather, Eastern Bloc countries promoted their own interpretation of human rights in the drafting of the UN human rights covenants, which was tied too to a return of socialist legality at home as an integral part of socialist governance from the 1960s onwards after the upheavals and violence of Stalinism (Betts, forthcoming; Moyal 2010). Socialist Bloc anti-apartheid activism now departed from the early days of Lenin's revolutionary concept of self-determination and turned to legalist concepts and rhetoric in support of Third World revolution.

When the Helsinki Accords firmly implemented legal norms of self-determination, territorial integrity, and human rights within the European collective security framework, socialist states had already unintentionally provided dissident groups with rights language for a long time (Altehenger 2018). The Eastern Bloc's long-standing commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle in the international arena similarly formed a crucial part in establishing human rights language within the Eastern Bloc (Szulecki 2011; Lal 2014). From the late 1970s onwards, the earlier use of rights talk in official forms of East-South solidarity provided dissident groups with human rights norms that they could turn against their governments. The fact that the activists of Charter 77 reverted to the accusation that living conditions under state socialism amounted to a "virtual apartheid" was thus no accident. Yet there was little solidarity between eastern European oppositions and anti-apartheid movements. Not only was the anti-apartheid struggle monopolised by regimes - it also appeared to be an issue that had the capacity to fascinate a "global public" more than their struggle against state socialism. It was only after the end of the Cold War that a history of a parallel struggle for rights and representation between eastern European dissidents and South African campaigners could be invented.

Discovering Anti-Apartheid in the Eastern Bloc

Eastern European socialist states had adopted rhetoric against racial discrimination rights from their foundation in the aftermath of the Second World War. Following the Polish condemnation of apartheid in 1949, socialist Bloc countries became vocal supporters of decolonisation in the

1950s. South African dissidents such as Ahmad Kathrada already featured as invited special guests at the World Youth Festival in East Berlin in 1951. The engagement with anti-apartheid activism massively expanded in the early 1960s. This was partly the consequence of the Sharpeville Massacre on 21 March 1960, when the South African police shot 59 civilian protesters, prompting an outcry across the world. But it also resulted from the subsequent crushing of the South African mass mobilisation against apartheid, and the resulting decision of the now-banned African National Congress (ANC) to develop deeper connections with socialist Bloc countries (Onslow 2009).

Yet this support for rights in the name of the anti-apartheid struggle also occurred at a moment when the Bloc was trying to regain its moral authority on the global stage. The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 had reinforced Western accusations of the imperialist nature of Soviet expansion after the Second World War and the images of Soviet tanks on the streets of Budapest undermined Soviet claims to be true supporters of anti-imperialism,. Groups started to collect funds in solidarity with the Hungarians in the streets of Cape Town and Johannesburg while students protested the invasion in Pretoria (Africa South 1957: 2). The conservative International Commission of Jurists compared the Hungarian invasion to apartheid for Western publics (The Times 1962). Some Western activists criticised both the South African government and the Soviet invasion in pursuit of a universal rights struggle that transcended the ideological divide of the Cold War (Justice 2018). The British-French intervention at the Suez Canal diverted some attention back to European colonial ambitions, but dangerous cracks emerged in South-East connections in 1956.) This equation of South Africa and Soviet-style rule in Eastern Europe was already reminiscent of later Chinese accusations of the Soviet Union's social imperialism (Chen 2013; Altehenger 2015).

Despite this equation, the events in some ways strengthened the relationship between the eastern Bloc and the South African left. After severe internal rifts, the leadership of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) brought their members in line and publicly supported the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt (Ellis and Sechaba 1992). The restored Hungarian Communist Party was isolated internationally, excluded from international bodies and needed to gain its support from an ever-increasing Afro-Asian Bloc to ensure its return into the international arena (OSA 1957). Against this background, it began to rewrite the story of what they called a 'counter-revolution' in a global context. The idea that the defeat of 'reactionary forces' echoed the struggle for freedom in Africa was deployed by foreign policy elites during extensive tours of the Global South, and at the UN, from 1957. Propaganda materials likened the "counter-revolution" of 1956 to the French and British colonial suppression in Cyprus and Algeria. The Hungarian regime highlighted the case of the so-called *disszidálok*, who had deserted Hungary after their failed attempt to re-establish 'Hitler's new order' in 1956 and who now tried to find a new home in the white racist South Africa. Eastern Bloc states increasingly used their own struggles as evidence of their natural affinity with struggles against reactionary forces across Africa, prefiguring their employment of equivalence between their own experience of Fascism, and black Africans of imperialism, that would be deployed in their rights work at the UN in the 1960s.

By the late 1950s, the emerging Sino-Soviet split put additional pressure on the Eastern Bloc to intensify Second-Third World cooperation. Mao Zedong aspired to lead the Third World based on racial solidarity between Africa and Asia against white supremacy and a shared colonial experience (Chen 2013; Altehenger 2015). As Beijing expanded its reach into Africa, it hoped to exploit the issue of race and anti-apartheid to its advantage. Mao repeatedly insisted to African leaders that those from the eastern Bloc were white Europeans who appeared –

through Khrushchev's policy of peaceful co-existence after 1956 – to be cozying up to the West, and hence could not be trusted. Support for anti-apartheid on the international stage offered many opportunities for eastern European states to show that they were still capable of playing leading roles in and anti-imperialists and anti-racist struggle on a global stage (Betts at al. 2019).

Moreover, the UN's call for economic sanctions against South Africa after the Sharpeville Massacre made Western countries vulnerable to new political accusations that they were aiding a racist regime. Yet, economic ties of socialist states and their arms sales to the apartheid regime soon tainted Eastern Bloc denunciations of Western neo-colonialism (Schleicher and Schleicher 2008: 12-24). Solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle thus posed a delicate problem. While the Eastern Bloc supported the movement in public, the pressure to maintain trade relations with Africa's wealthiest region – especially given their exclusion from Western European markets - opened up the socialist Bloc to Chinese attacks of an insufficient commitment. It was in this context that eastern Bloc states began to work with their counterparts in Africa at the UN to counter the effects of racial discrimination and apartheid in international law.

Connecting to the Third World through Anti-Imperialist Human Rights Language

Although socialist states briefly embraced rhetoric of human rights after the end of the Second World War, regime change in Eastern Europe and the ensuing global Cold War confrontation kept the focus of the Soviet leadership firmly focused on revolutionary ideology and armed struggle. In the realm of international law, the Soviet Union's focus remained on outlawing military aggression and punishing war crimes. The horrors of the Third Reich's war of extermination on the soil of the Soviet Union and across Eastern Europe prompted this Soviet emphasis on establishing the crime of aggressive warfare under international law as the central crime against humanity (Hirsch 2008; von Lingen 2014). During this period, socialist Bloc references to human rights therefore remained grounded in revolutionary ideology, which also still endorsed armed struggle for the revolution. Across Eastern Europe, revolutionary justice and political show trials shaped the establishment of socialist states in the wake of the Red Army's advance and Soviet domination. In the consolidation of socialist rule in the late 1940s and early 1950s, party ideology and extra-judicial persecution of political enemies trumped legalist approaches. The "legalist moment" of 1945, that saw the foundation of the UN and a short-lived enthusiasm for universalist legal concepts peaking in the Declaration of Human Rights, had been thwarted by the Cold War's ideological divide (Mazower 2004; Mazower 2011).

Moreover, the Soviets, and later eastern Bloc countries, often found that they had little influence within Third World debates on international law. The Soviets had had an ambiguous relationship with anti-colonial activists since the interwar period. On one hand, their experts had long rallied against bourgeois international law as the handmaiden of colonialism that had upheld the unequal League of Nations treaty system in the 1920s and 30s. The Soviets had supported including the principle of self-determination into the drafting of the postwar UN Charter at San Francisco and continued to see their country at the forefront of supporting decolonisation. Nevertheless, the Soviets' ambivalence about cultural self-determination within the Soviet Union (Fisch 2015: 191), and the post-war accusations of Stalin's imperialist policies in Eastern Europe alienated many in the Third World even before the Hungarian invasion in 1956. The Soviets fending off of mechanisms to implement human rights within

their national borders after the Declaration of Human Rights had been proclaimed in 1948 also provoked suspicion. The long-term internal struggle within Soviet legal circles between revolutionary and more normative approaches to law added to the confusion among anti-colonial governments.

Given this complicated heritage, the Eastern Bloc had to rethink its rights rhetoric with regard to the Third World in the late 1950s. Until then, Eastern Bloc countries led by Poland had mainly seen international law as part of their attempts to grapple with their own region's experience of fascism and imperialism. The rise of new rights language offered an opportunity to show support for Afro-Asian countries within the UN. The ideological rifts within the UN kept delaying the conversion of the Declaration of Human Rights into international law (Fisch 2015: 196). Since the late 1940s, UN member states disagreed over the legal nature and reach of the new international "bill of rights". Initiatives ranged from keeping the Declaration of Human Rights reduced to a set of non-binding principles to plans of drafting a legally binding convention or a combination of conventions and principles. Established nation-states feared infringements on their domestic sovereignty and jurisdiction while anti-colonial movements kept on pressing for securing independence through UN conventions. Yet, the right of self-determination as the main vehicle for decolonising countries to legitimise their calls for independence remained a mere principle as long as the codification of human rights dragged on. It consequently only became a human right in 1976 when the human rights covenants took effect after the necessary number of thirty-five UN member states had ratified them (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 212).

These long-term conflicts surrounding the drafting a human rights convention after 1948 allowed the Eastern Bloc to reframe its human rights rhetoric. In support of African and Asian states, eastern European governments moved to endorse anti-racial discrimination legislation and calls for individual and collective self-determination in context of decolonisation as human rights issues. Since the heyday of Soviet legalism that had culminated in the Stalin Constitution of 1936, the Soviet legal profession had been on the retreat. In the initial phase of regime consolidation after 1945, legal experts were often targeted politically during the phase or regime consolidation across Eastern Europe. The return of socialist legality promoted by the Soviet Union first prompted fears within Eastern Bloc party leaderships that the primacy of the party was under attack. Yet, the end of Stalinism eventually gave new life to socialist law and legality as a means of regime stabilisation countering the uprising of East Germans in 1953 and Hungarians in 1956 next to intermittent bursts of protest in Poland. After the death of Stalin in 1953 and the denunciation of his rule by Khrushchev in his Secret Speech of 1956, the return of socialist legality at home ushered in a new focus on international rights languages.

With the return to law, socialist ideologues, party leaderships, and legal experts not only put renewed emphasis onto the role of law under socialism, but also re-evaluated their position towards international law. Endorsing Third World human rights concerns centred on self-determination, anti-racial discrimination, and apartheid held many advantages for socialist Bloc countries. First, it enabled them to project a particular vision of rights internationally. These alliances formed partly out of a reaction to (primarily) US attempts to advocate for civil and political rights over the collective social, racial and economic rights on an international stage. As the western position became dominant in the early 1960s - as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights seemed to be relegated to a secondary position - a renewed alliance between the Eastern Bloc and the Afro-Asian Bloc became politically useful for both sides (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 197-208). Second, it appeared to help particular national causes. The East German government for instance hoped that this

commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle would unite the Afro-Asian vote within the UN in favour of a recognition of GDR sovereignty against Western policies of diplomatic isolation (Gehrig 2018). The Hungarian regime meanwhile saw international anti-apartheid advocacy as a way out of its diplomatic isolation after the uprising in 1956, joining the first UN Special Committee against Apartheid with mainly African and Asian states - and no western countries – partly to achieve this end (Szegő, 1985). Hungarian UN delegates then coordinated support for the defendants in South Africa's Rivonia Trial, in which Nelson Mandela and others were sentence to life in prison on 12 June 1964 (UN Archive Geneva 1965). Third, it represented a new human rights battlefield, on which the Eastern Bloc could operate without having to watch its back all the time. The Afro-Asian battle for self-determination and racial discrimination targeted the old European colonial powers. Decolonising countries themselves even demanded the restriction in the application of the right of self-determination as a human right to peoples inside of the territorial reach of colonial empires. Pushing for the criminalization of apartheid offered Eastern Bloc governments a human rights issue that allowed for aid and solidarity campaigns at home, continuous attacks on Western colonialism and racism, and the promotion of moral superiority of the socialist Bloc within the UN as long as Western states Blocked effective international measures against the South African government. This state socialist activism in the field of racial discrimination also coincided with renewed fears over a return of fascism and a rise in anti-Semitism in Western countries. A wave of swastika drawings in the Federal Republic in 1959 and 1960 raised the specter of Nazism once more within the global public.

The region's involvement in such rights work could also be rooted in their own experience of seeking justice for the crimes of Fascism. The significant responsibility that Poland's judicial apparatus had borne for the prosecution of Nazi war criminals would eventually lead the country to forge an important role in opening up questions about the criminality of apartheid at the UN. Warsaw sponsored a special study of racial discrimination, with the aim of making all countries comply with the Universal Declaration (Abraszewski 1975: 155). In 1965, it introduced a proposal to the UN Commission on Human Rights to end statutory limitations on international crimes committed by the Axis Powers during the Second World War (Grosescu 2019). This initiative in turn provoked the return of a wider international debate about the nature of "crimes against humanity". Unlike Western states who wished to keep the debate to those crimes defined at Nuremberg, the Eastern Bloc and states from the South advocated widening such definitions to include "crimes against peace" and "colonialism". The latter also supported the introduction of "inhumane acts resulting from the policy of apartheid" as part of this definition (Balicki 1980: 251, UN 1968). The twenty-fifth UN General Assembly of that year adopted a resolution on Measures to be taken against Nazism and racial intolerance, that had been filed by Poland, along with Iraq and the Ukrainian SSR, and again explicitly mentioned apartheid (AAN 1627/88). Unable to build consensus, the resulting 1968 UN Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity had little impact during the Cold War. Nevertheless, it marked the first time that apartheid had been defined internationally as a crime, and acted as a spur to further legal activism.

While the human rights covenants took almost thirty years to take effect after the signature of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the anti-racial discrimination declaration passed all UN hurdles from the first declaration to taking effect as a convention in less than a decade. Yet, the powers of implementation of the convention still remained extremely limited. As a Polish delegate highlighted in the debates around the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), "what was really missing was a

legal tool for fighting racial discrimination, which would define precisely not only general aims but also means of implementation" (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 260). The Soviet Union had insisted alongside and on behalf of African countries that the preamble of the convention should outlaw all scientific theories of racial superiority. This broad approach allowed the Polish and Hungarian delegations to mount an attack on the US and point to the slow pace of desegregation in the American South (Hungarian National Archives 1965). Conflicts between member states over whether specific forms of racism such as Nazism, anti-Semitism, or apartheid should be mentioned in the convention ended in the consensus that only the terms "apartheid" and "racial segregation" entered into the convention draft (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 261-269). This restricted emphasis on decolonisation also helped divert attention away from ethnic friction, particularly anti-Semitism, within the Eastern Bloc (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 213).

From the early 1960s, conflicts around apartheid marked a shift in international legal debates that placed anti-racism at the center of anti-colonial rights work for sovereignty and self-determination. Decolonization now outpaced older European-dominated interwar legal debates over the protection of ethnic and religious minorities, the rights of women, and class-related discrimination. Within the UN, colonial powers engaged in a hard-fought retreat after the defeat of the so-called colonial clause in 1950, which would have granted them similar legal double standards that had allowed them to deny colonial territories rights as independent actors, as had been the case under the League of Nations (Pederson 2015; Anghie 2005; Koskenniemi 2001). When the numbers of decolonized UN members grew towards the late 1950s and early 1960s, anti-racism garnered increasing attention in debates on human rights and international law. For a long time, socialist states relied on their anti-fascist credentials in defeating Nazism in these debates. SED leader Walter Ulbricht was in particular at pains to prove the GDR's anti-racist foundations by claiming already in 1950 that there existed no longer any racial hatred in his young state (Slobodian 2015: 26). Yet such Eastern Bloc commitment to the battle against racism did not at first transfer into initiatives for new international legal norms. This only changed after the Sharpeville Massacre and the Congo Crisis (1960-66) discredited Western approaches to humanitarian intervention and international law.

Apartheid soon dominated international politics as it regarded anti-discrimination law. When the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities proposed further action to combat these issues in 1961, the inquiry of the committee still focused on studies into anti-Semitism, the position of women, the right to education, the right to leave and re-enter a country, religious discrimination, alongside other political rights. Racial discrimination featured only as the last item in the sub-committee's list of concerns (UN 1961). This was not surprising given the fact that African states still had a very limited representation within the Commission on Human Rights and its sub-commissions. Yet, African states made effective use of the General Assembly and quickly put apartheid front and center in voicing strong support for a UN anti-discrimination convention. Only one year later, the General Assembly adopted resolution 1780 (XVII), which tasked the Commission on Human Rights to prepare a draft declaration and convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 247-260).

The accelerated speed of decolonization now began to show in UN politics. The accession of more and more Asian and African states to the UN and the support of the Eastern Bloc resulted in the proclamation of the Declaration on the Elimination of all Racial Discrimination on 20 November 1963. In the fight for a UN convention banning racial discrimination, Eastern Bloc media regularly publicized the votes against the declaration by the US, UK, Portugal, Australia,

New Zealand, and South Africa front and center in their coverage of the issue in the following years (Neues Deutschland 1965). Western dominance in the Security Council and political and economic pressure on newly independent states could only postpone the drafting of a convention for so long. With the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act passing the US House of Representatives and the US Senate in 1964 and 1965, the US administration ended its opposition to parts of the UN convention that could have previously embarrassed the US internationally. Pressure mounted within the General Assembly and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination passed on 21 December 1965 with 106 votes in favor, none against, and only one abstention. It entered into force on 4 January 1969.

Although anti-racial discrimination norms were now firmly established as human rights, the issue of apartheid persisted: despite it being the only specific form of discrimination highlighted in the Declaration, it did little to weaken the South African apartheid regime. The highflying plans for implementation mechanisms fell short. Once individuals or groups had overcome the hurdles to submit an official complaint to Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, all the committee was able to do was making suggestions to the state concerned (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 272). Yet, the convention's explicit condemnation of apartheid nonetheless turned the situation in South Africa even more into a beacon of injustice. Labelled a crime against humanity by the UN General Assembly in 1966, African states pressed on with the support of the socialist Bloc to not just outlaw apartheid but criminalize it. After 1965, the anti-apartheid movement turned to the goal of achieving a separate convention on apartheid that included mechanisms for criminal prosecution.

This cause was reinforced by the inability of other venues for international justice to address effectively the issue of apartheid. Only months after the General Assembly had passed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on 21 December 1965, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) failed to in a rule against South Africa's expansion of apartheid laws to South West Africa. The court was split with seven judges for and against a verdict in the case against South Africa. The ICJ's president Sir Percy Spender (Australia) casted the decisive vote that overruled seven judges including the court's vice-president Wellington Koo (Republic of China), Vladimir M. Koretsky (USSR), Kotaro Tanaka (Japan), Philip C. Jessup (US), Luis Padilla-Nervo (Mexico), Isaac Forster (Senegal), and ad-hoc judge Sir Louis Mbanefo (Eastern Nigeria) (International Court of Justice 1966). This failure to rule against the expansion of the apartheid system would damage the reputation of the court for years to come. The ICJ's decision also reinforced the campaign for a separate apartheid convention. After their accession to the UN, countries from the Afro-Asian Bloc took up more and more UN committee posts in the late 1960s that they could utilise to increase the political pressure.

UNESCO's worldwide promotion of a UN Year of Human Rights in 1968 helped to bring anti-imperialism and human rights together for domestic audiences across the Eastern Bloc. At a UN endorsed major international conference at Tehran, Western, Eastern Bloc, and Afro-Asian Bloc countries clashed in fierce conflicts over the meaning and reach of human rights. While decolonised states pushed for a link between human rights, humanitarian law, and implementation measures that allowed the prosecution of racial discrimination and apartheid in particular, Western states saw their fundamental legal understanding of individual rights rooted in natural law under severe attack (Burke 2010: 92-111; Jensen 2016: 196-208). To complement this international conference, the GDR African-Asian Solidarity Committee hosted delegations from the USSR, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the ANC,

SWAPO, and FRELIMO to emphasise Eastern Bloc solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle. At a widely popularised conference titled *Against Racism and Neo-colonialism*, delegations from across the socialist Bloc made the link between class struggle and economic exploitation with racial discrimination, neo-colonialism, and the rise of human rights norms in a socialist interpretation (*Against Racism and Neo-Colonialism* 1965: 5).

Eastern European countries also supported other conventions. The twenty-seventh UN General Assembly of 1972, which was presided by the Pole Stanisław Trepczyński, recognized the freedom movements of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau as the authentic representatives of the local people, after which the Security Council called the Portuguese government to stop all military acts and to start negotiations (AAN 1627/88). Poland was also member of the United Nations Council for Namibia, the legal authority administering Namibia that continued to be occupied by South Africa after the UN had terminated its mandate in 1966 (AAN KC PZPR LXXVI-851; Weissbrodt and Mahoney 1986). Poland, along with Ukraine and Iraq would file the UN resolution on measures to be taken against Nazism and racial intolerance adopted by the General Assembly in 1976 (AAN 1976).

Apartheid thus provided a global rights issue that could unite Eastern Bloc and Third World anti-imperialist activism in the field of human rights from 1960 onwards. In the eyes of Eastern Bloc countries, continued support of the Afro-Asian Bloc in the pursuit of anti-racial discrimination norms and the anti-apartheid convention helped paper over repeated rifts in East-South relations, especially after the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The increasing institutional influence of the Afro-Asian Bloc beyond the floor of the General Assembly and Eastern Bloc support eventually resulted in the passing of the Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid on 30 November 1973. From 1971, the USSR and Guinea had been the important players in drafting the convention to deal specifically with the suppression and punishment of apartheid. In 1973, the UN General Assembly finalized its Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid; 91 votes in favor, with four against (Portugal, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States) and 26 abstentions. Hungary was the first country in the world to ratify it – on 20 June 1974 (UN 1976: 244). Hungary led the way in implementing the convention into domestic law in 1978—though it was never used—while Bulgaria did the same and the legislation was eventually redeployed in the 1990s against Communists who had persecuted the Turkish minority.

Nevertheless, Western states often opposed it, as they feared that a UN Commission on Human Rights suddenly would acquire the authority to override the powers of sovereign governments. The Convention demanded the radical enlargement of the reach of international criminal law, which appeared to directly threaten national sovereignty and the legal protection that nation-states offered their citizens. The US representative Clarence Clyde Ferguson Jr agreed with the classification of apartheid as a crime against humanity, yet argued that such crimes should be prosecuted in the framework set up by the victorious powers during the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials. A new international prosecution regime as proposed in the apartheid convention threatened the security of US citizens. Ferguson argued that the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination would already cover all required international legal provisions to battle apartheid with its explicit mention of apartheid. He casually overlooked the insufficient powers granted by the convention to combat apartheid effectively (UN 1973). These US concerns, however, could not halt the passing of the Apartheid Convention on 30 November 1973.

South African-Eastern Bloc Encounters, the Appropriation of Apartheid as Dissident Language, and the End of Apartheid

The Eastern Bloc remained steadfast in its international declarations of support for the anti-apartheid struggle in the decades after the Second World War. Yet, the realities of East-South encounters were much more complicated than the joint Afro-Asian and Eastern Bloc rights campaigns at the UN and in the international arena suggested. The rise of alternative revolutionary models in Africa and Asia called for a turn towards the Third World. However, socialist Bloc states moved to a focus on Africa and Asia and apartheid in particular with different intensity depending on their national interests. The gulf between international rights rhetoric and national politics at home remained throughout the Cold War.

Everyday relationships between South Africans and their Eastern Bloc hosts remained complicated. Underneath the intense propaganda drives at home and abroad, South African exchange students and other guests often had ambiguous experiences. Despite the intense anti-apartheid propaganda and solidarity rhetoric of Eastern European states, organizing aid collections and mass events in support of the Third World was one thing. Yet, accommodating African guests at home was quite another. Hosting African and Asian comrades also unearthed racial prejudices within Eastern Bloc societies (Stevens 2015); Pugach 2015). This racial bias also showed in dissident language. By the late 1970s, rights language of solidarity between the Eastern Bloc and Afro-Asian countries were in decline. With the UN human rights covenants taking effect in 1976, the Afro-Asian agenda of a New Economic World Order rivalled human rights activism centered on racial discrimination. To secure their independence and national self-determination, African and Asian countries that had emerged from colonial rule now pushed for their economic self-determination. The demand for a human right to development became the new major battleground within the UN. Since membership of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had been expanded in 1967 to reflect the accession of Third World countries to the UN, developing countries and the Eastern Bloc commanded a two-thirds majority in the UN Commission on Human Rights. While Western states Blocked all attempts to push for the implementation of a right to development and Eastern Bloc state had serious reservations, this new majority allowed for the passing of a Charter on the Economic Rights and Duties of States in 1974 (Normand and Zaidi 2008: 291-295). With this reorientation of human rights debates, the ideological grip of Eastern Bloc countries on the usage of term "apartheid" at home began to wane in the late 1970s. Although the GDR and the Soviets continued their military and propaganda support for the struggle in South Africa in the 1980s (Schleicher 2008: 1145; Shubin and Traikova 2008: 1017-1019; Costea 1990: 396-403), in many countries of the Bloc it was on the wane: Hungary and Poland in particular established economic exchange with South Africa long before the collapse of state socialism. For instance: Polish ships bought oil and supplies in South African ports and Warsaw in 1983 opened chartered flights to Cape Town. (Gasztold-Seń 2018: 206).

Nevertheless, the "rights work" centered on discrimination that eastern European regimes had undertaken in the 1960s came back to bite them domestically in the 1970s and 1980s. Having establishing rights as an accepted part of international law – a strategy that was designed to shame western capitalism and colonialism – the eastern Bloc created norms that would eventually disrupt their own authority. In the context of détente, these ideas were now retooled in the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which would bring these conceptions of rights into the Bloc, and through this into the language of opposition movements (Jensen 2016, 217-218, 235). More specifically, we find apartheid discussed in dissident texts, employing the increasing global resonance of the term to draw attention to their own struggles. The Hungarian minority in

Transylvania invoked the power of the concept of apartheid mainly to highlight the ethnically-based discrimination they faced at the hands of a nationalizing Romanian state. Both Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and Polish dissidents used the term to suggest a different form of apartheid, based on political and religious criteria (Charter 77; KOR, 1977).

Yet, the similarities seen in the anti-apartheid struggle and Eastern European dissident movements never transformed into language of a common cause. The ANC had never denounced the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The ten-million strong independent Polish trade union Solidarity (*Solidarność*) did see opportunities to support fellow trade unions in South Africa in the struggle against apartheid, but found it difficult to identify with a movement with which the Warsaw Communists expressed solidarity. Moreover, they did not want to jeopardise generous financial contributions from right-wing Polish emigres now living in South Africa with aggressive anti-apartheid rhetoric (Christiaens and Goddeeris 2018). Within the Polish movement, some conservative attacks on Third World socialism and anti-apartheid activism went even further. In 1985, Andrzej Frycz claimed in a Polish underground journal that multi-coloured socialism had begun to oppress white Europeans and turned them into the real victims of apartheid:

> "it is we, the white Negroes, who are supposed to support and strengthen the system of socialist apartheid – the voting regulations preserve class separation between the multi-coloured nomenklatura and the white negroes, several controlled homelands in the form of restricted private property… the Polish white negro may become coloured … provided he swears allegiance to the Polish apartheid." (Frycz 1985)

As the anti-apartheid movement gained strength in the West, eastern Bloc dissidents often saw themselves more in a competition for the attention of the global public (Betts et al. 2019). The frustration of Eastern European dissidents and their emigre supporters with the dominance of apartheid as an international rights issue surfaced repeatedly during the 1980s. The American sociologist Noam Chomsky even denounced this Eastern European self-absorbed attitude emphasizing their own plight as a lack of any real feeling for the struggles of the Global South. There was some evidence for Chomsky's assertion. A Hungarian emigre journal linked to *A Magyarok Világszövetsége* denounced Soviet support for the anti-apartheid struggle as a large-scale distraction from rights violations across the socialist Bloc. Given these effects of the ANC's struggle for Eastern European protest movements, the journal argued that support for anti-apartheid activism and dissident movements was mutually exclusive. In an imaginary letter to the United Nations, the dramatist Sławomir Mrożek sarcastically argued that the Polish had to "black up" in order to reach global attention:

> "I should like to report, that the Poles are also Negros, as they are whites. By virtue of our rights to independence. If the dear organization was disturbed by the colour of our skin, or if some kind of difficulty surfaces in this regard, then we can repaint ourselves. To this end we ask the dear organization to supply us with black Kiwi-branded shoe polish. It's not our fault we are white. This was just how it came to be. […] We don't ask for the polish for free. For every kilo we receive, we can send in exchange a tonne of red varnish." (Frycz 1985)

This distancing was not the case everywhere in the Eastern Bloc. In the GDR, an authentic culture of anti-apartheid linked to social forces that were beyond, and often critical of, the state, existed in the 1980s. Its Protestant churches in particular – although oppositional to the regime around issues of peace, military service and environment issues (Pfaff 2001) – were

nevertheless supportive of the official anti-racist and rights-based policy on South Africa (Richardson-Little 2013). Within the anti-racism politics of the World Council of Churches they helped to provide humanitarian assistance for SWAPO and other liberation movements (Schleicher and Schleicher 1998:184). In this way, the GDR churches were in league – often to their own discomfort –with the regime in the campaign to challenge apartheid (Krusche 1998).

The unexpected downfall of state socialist regimes across Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union transformed the confrontation over apartheid. While the South African regime lost its Cold War foe and "red terror" rhetoric to paint the anti-apartheid opposition as the long arm of Moscow, the ANC, SWAPO and the South African Communist Party lost their ideological anchor as well. Deprived of the military assistance from Eastern Bloc countries, the ANC abandoned armed struggle and looked to the modes of peaceful protest that had allowed for the monumental political transformations of 1989 across Eastern Europe. After the competition in attracting international attention for their struggles, Eastern European dissidents and South African protesters saw common bonds in their movements after the collapse of state socialism. After the end of apartheid in 1994, the role of state socialist regimes in supporting the anti-apartheid struggle as a human rights issue was recognized, if celebrated only in South Africa (Betts et. al 2019). While the memory of communist support through financial, scientific, and military aid for South African fighters was reshaped to highlight the excesses (and even "crimes") of Communism in eastern Europe, the crucial role of state-mandated anti-apartheid human rights talk emanating from the Eastern Bloc quickly vanished once the human rights debate was critically transformed by the end of the Cold War.

Conclusion

The Eastern Bloc actively took part in the transformation of human rights language in the 1960s and 1970s through their engagement with anti-apartheid at the UN. The reasons for initial engagement had ranged widely: the GDR government remained particularly invested in building bridges to the Afro-Asian Bloc through its opposition to apartheid, and hoped to use the links to Third World countries to pressure the international community into accepting GDR sovereignty. The Hungarian leadership also tried to use apartheid as an issue to reconnect to international affairs after the uprising of 1956 had been suppressed by Soviet troops. Other socialist countries such as Poland conversely had a much more conflicted and looser relationship with the anti-apartheid movement (Betts et al. 2019). This relationship was also concerned with the strategic repositioning of Bloc countries in the mid-Cold War global order: determined to refute Chinese claims that their whiteness barred a leadership role in the anti-imperialist struggle, and seeking to refute the idea that peaceful co-existence was bringing the Bloc too close to the West, anti-apartheid and anti-racist work offered the socialist Bloc an international issue and common rights language authentically to condemn western neo-colonialism and to connect to the decolonizing world. Working to support for anti-apartheid could also be used to paper over the rifts in Second-Third World relations, especially during the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 when the anti-imperialist credentials of the Soviet Union and its socialist brother states underwent serious challenge from its critics.

Regardless of the reasons for this engagement, eastern European states played a major role at international institutions, in collaboration with a range of states from Africa and the Caribbean, in the formulation of new rights to combat apartheid and racial discrimination from the early

1960s. This raised global awareness for racial discrimination as a human rights issues and lent crucial support to the Afro-Asian Bloc within the UN–even as the Cold War divide prevented the implementation of effective prosecution mechanisms for human rights violations. In the mid-1970s, with the onset of détente, leaders in the Bloc hoped that the Helsinki Process would not only bring east-west reconciliation in Europe, but, through removing the Communist threat, encourage a progressive West to more openly support progressive causes in Africa–including an end to apartheid. Indeed, this period also saw the emergence of connections between anti-apartheid in western and Eastern Europe: from this perspective, South Africa was part of the story of the journey back to a less divided Europe.

This intellectual rights work would rebound back into Eastern Europe. Although these governments saw their sustained socialist rights activism in the international arena as fundamentally disconnected from question of rights within the Eastern Bloc, others did not. Dissident groups across Eastern Europe appropriated the language of apartheid to describe their own exclusion under the Communist state, although – outside the GDR – they were little interested in connecting their own domestic struggles with the anti-apartheid movement. Instead, they pointed out the hypocrisy of their states which attempted to distance such rights work from their own situation; rather they chose to bring this state-mandated rights language of socialist law and global human rights to denounce the hypocrisy of its non-fulfilment at home–what Vaclav Havel called the mere facade of socialist legality (Havel 1992).

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